

“Work plus prayer”: The life and legacy of Dr. Martha Jane Gifford (1886-1982)¹

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Introduction

Dr. Martha Jane Gifford (1886-1982) was a twentieth century American Baptist missionary doctor who served in Burma and India. Though Martha was a “quiet, unassuming little woman,” her legacy in serving the Lord overseas speaks loudly. Though documentation about some aspects of her ministry is lacking, what is recorded marks her out as a fine example of feminine piety and godliness.

When Salvatore Mondello (1932-2006), Professor Emeritus of Rochester Institute of Technology, called Martha “one of the most significant woman in the history of [the American Baptist] denomination,” he overstated Martha’s legacy. This paper ventures to present a more realistic assessment of her significance, and yet still give due honour to her legacy.² Martha was indeed an important woman in twentieth century American Baptist life and it would be unfortunate if her legacy remained unexplored.

¹I am greatly indebted to a number of people for their help in the writing and research of this paper. Thanks go out to my mother-in-law Cindy Fraher, who is the great-granddaughter of Martha Gifford’s brother (Alva) and provided excellent details and materials from Martha’s legacy. George Rogers, a genealogical researcher specializing in Hornby, New York, provided many useful documents. Susan Moore, the town historian of Hornby, surveyed the Hornby Museum’s holdings and took some photographs for this project. Garth Brokaw, former President/CEO of Fairport Baptist Homes, provided valuable information and suggest some corrections. I’m also grateful to have received translation assistance from Pon Nya Mon, who is the chairman of the Monland Restoration Council, and Ashley South, an independent researcher specializing in Burma/Myanmar and Southeast Asia.

² Salvatore taught at Rochester Institute of Technology from 1967 until 1992 or later.

Christian historians have at times neglected the important role of women in Christian missions. Baptist women were especially crucial in the first overseas American Baptist mission—the work in Burma in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One question we are confronted with when we consider the case of Martha Gifford is this: Does she have the significance of other Baptist women who worked in Burma? Is she on the same level as Ann Judson (1789-1826), Eliza Grew Jones (1803-1838), Sarah Hall Boardman (1803-1845), Deborah Wade (1801-1868), or Calista Vinton (1807-1864)? The general conclusion implied in this paper is that while Martha may never have the historical significance of these women, she truly continued their work and therefore is their “daughter” in that sense. Martha left an edifying and endearing legacy, whether or not she ever garners substantial academic study.



Photograph #1: An undated photo of Martha taken at an unknown location.³

This paper presents a brief summary of Martha’s life and legacy. Though her story is largely untold, a thorough survey of Baptist documents and other resources from the twentieth

³ This photo is from the personal files of Cindy Fraher. It is used with permission.

century is sufficient to assemble a reasonable biographical sketch. We will not exhaust this area of study and, sadly, there will be significant gaps and underdeveloped areas. Much effort remains in collecting and analyzing relevant material. For the time being this paper will attempt to synthesize the information currently available into a smooth narrative.

Family Background



Photograph #2: The Gifford family. (Left to right) Back row: Joseph, Cora, Alva. Front row: Alice, Martha, James, Ethel.⁴

Martha's parents were James Riley Gifford (1846-1923) and Alice D. Coye (1851-1940), farmers living in Hornby, Steuben County, New York.⁵ They married in 1870 and had five children, Cora

⁴ This photo is from the personal files of Cindy Fraher. It is used with permission.

(1871-1957), Alva (1875-1959), Joseph (1880-1954), Ethel Bess (1884-1990), and Martha, who was born on August 25, 1886. Martha was probably named after her paternal aunt: Martha Jane (Gifford) Quick (1839-1919).

James moved to Hornby with his parents when he was almost twenty. He became “one of the leading and most highly respected farmers” in the area. The Gifford farm sat on the west side of Route 41 (Hornby Road), between Rogers Road and Haradon Road. Alice’s parents (Martha’s maternal grandparents) were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Hornby, a congregation going back to 1828. It is likely that James and Alice attended there as well, though when James died, his funeral was held the Congregational church at Hornby Forks. The church divided in 1843, leading to the formation of a Wesleyan group, but it appears that the Gifford family remained in their original church.

Though not raised a Baptist, Martha had some Baptist family heritage. Her paternal uncle and aunt, Martin (1840-1920) and Martha (Gifford) Quick, were Baptists.⁵ Likewise, her maternal great-grandmother, Dinah (Barker) Goodsell (1795-1885) became a Baptist in 1823. One source speculates that Dinah’s mother and Martha’s great-great grandmother, Hannah (Cushman) Barker (1773-1857), may have been a Baptist, though more research of genealogical material would be required to verify that possibility.

Early Years (1886-1907)

⁵ Hornby was named after John Hornby, “an eminent English land-holder.” In the late 1800s it had “thirty residences” and “two stores.”

⁶ Martin Henderson Quick and his wife Martha lived in Manistique, Michigan. Martin worked for Chicago Lumbering Company.

Martha was educated at elementary schools in Hornby. She then attended and graduated from Northside High School in Corning, New York. This is remarkable considering only ten percent of eighth grade graduates in Corning proceeded to high school in 1910.⁷ Ethel, Martha's older sister by two years, graduated in 1902, and presumably Martha would have graduated in 1904. There would have been approximately five students in her class.



Photograph #3: Northside High School pictured in 1909, a few years after Martha taught there.⁸

After completing high school, Martha enrolled in teacher training and then taught at county schools in the area for two years, saving up for college. During this period, Martha became a Baptist.

At some point Martha became a member of North Baptist Church in Corning. The church had been established in 1902 with George Laughton as pastor.⁹ It was a member of the Chemung River Baptist Association--which was founded in 1796. Not much is known about the timing of

⁷ In 1963, with the opening of the East and West High Schools, Northside High School, also known as "Northside Blodgett High School," became a Junior High School.

⁸ This photo is from George Lane's Flickr account. It is used here under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial ShareALike license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>). The image has not been changed, except for scaling adjustments.

⁹ Other pastors who served this church in the early 1900s include L. J. Long, L. B. Underwood, and W. Norman Liddy.

Martha's membership or whether she joined another Baptist church first, but she was a member of North Baptist by the early 1940s.¹⁰

Kalamazoo College (1907-1910)

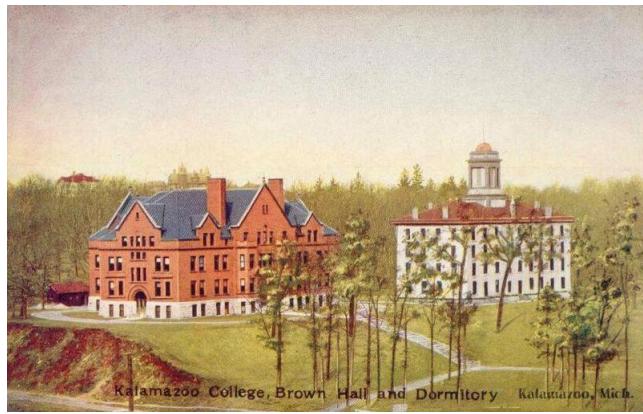
In 1907, Martha began studying at Kalamazoo College, an American Baptist School in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Originally known as The Kalamazoo Literary Institute, the institution's charter was granted in 1833 with the hope that it would "exert a most salutary influence upon the Baptist cause."¹¹ The school came into being as part of a westward push which followed the great surge of new Baptist educational institutions appearing in the eastern states between 1816 and 1826.¹²

From our vantage point, it is remarkable that there would even be a Baptist college founded in Michigan in the early 1830s. By 1829, there were only five Baptist churches in Michigan--with a combined membership of under 200. This is hardly what would be expected for a sustainable support base required to maintain a post-secondary institution. Nevertheless, the venture reflected some of the era's optimism, and the "missionary spirit," which eagerly and successfully carried on its founding vision.

¹⁰ Her brother lived on the same street as the church.

¹¹ In its 1887 charter, the school was required to have a Baptist president and three quarters of its trustees needed to be Baptist as well. Now, the school is all but fully separated from its Baptist heritage. The school's religious mission has disappeared and it receives no support from the American Baptist denomination.

¹² For instance, Waterville College in Maine, Columbian College in Washington, Hamilton Literary and Theological Institution in New York State, Newton Seminary in Massachusetts, Georgetown College in Kentucky, and New Hampton Institution in New Hampshire.



Photograph #4: The Kalamazoo College campus in 1906, a few years before Martha attended.¹³

At Kalamazoo, Martha was in the class of 1910. When Martha graduated, the campus consisted of twenty-five acres of land with four buildings. One might wonder why Martha, a girl from New York State, with at least two excellent Baptist institutions of its own, chose to attend Kalamazoo College. The explanation seems to be found in Martha's uncle and aunt from Michigan, Martin and Martha (Gifford) Quick. They had strong links with Kalamazoo College. Martin served on the board of trustees in 1911, and their son Oren Gifford Quick (1876-1946) attended Kalamazoo and was in the class of 1898. It should be noted in passing that there was also a link between Kalamazoo College and Steuben County in the form of the school's president, Arthur Gaylord Slocum (b. 1847). Slocum formerly lived in Steuben County, specifically Corning, New York.¹⁴ He served as a school superintendent of the Union Schools and Principal of Corning Free Academy, a public high school, for sixteen years before going to Kalamazoo. On an initial glance, one might even suspect that Martha could have been his student in high school or taught at his school. However, this connection seems impossible since Slocum was already at Kalamazoo in 1897--when Martha was around 11 years old. In any case, Slocum's term at Kalamazoo seems

¹³ This photo is in the public domain and comes from a postcard.

¹⁴ The 1887 alumni directory of Rochester University, where he graduated from in 1874, lists his current residence as Corning.

to have been beneficial for Martha, bringing “financial prosperity and literary excellence,” and having a faculty that was “able and harmonious.”

Before long, Martha joined the Eurodelphian literary society, a society of “high character” founded in 1856. According to one of her poems, it aimed for “fluent speaking” and “a literary style.” Martha served as recording secretary in 1907, president in 1910, and also as chair. There are small fragments of her involvement in the society which can be found by reviewing old school newspapers. For instance, in 1907 she read her paper on “The Work of Alexander von Humboldt in America.” In 1908 she told the story of the English opera “The Bohemian Girl.” In terms of other extra-curricular involvement, Martha was an associate editor for the school newspaper, *The College Index*, and participated in Y. M. C. A. events, in one case giving a talk on the “Bible, It’s Power and Usefulness.”

It seems that Martha attended First Baptist Church of Kalamazoo while she was in Kalamazoo. The congregation goes back to 1836, having been established by a Baptist minister from Vermont, Jeremiah Hall (1805-1881).¹⁵ It gathered in the oldest church building in town, built in 1853.

Kalamazoo College was strongly focused on missions. A perusal of the pages of *The College Index* shows that the Burma Baptist missions cause frequently came to the attention of the students. For instance, in January 1909 Leonard W. Cronkhite (1846-1931) from Burma “gave a very interesting talk on present day Christian work, especially in Burma and other Eastern

¹⁵ Jeremiah Hall pastored Baptist churches in many other locations, including: Westford, Vermont; Bennington, Vermont; Norwalk, Ohio; Akron, Ohio; Granville, Ohio; Fredericktown, Ohio; Waverly, Iowa; and St. Clair, Michigan.

countries.”¹⁶ The year Martha left for Burma, Carrie Estella Slaght (d. 1937)--one of her fellow students at Kalamazoo, became a missionary doctor to West China. Carrie also came from New York State, specifically Interlaken. It is not hard to visualize it as a close friendship, especially since they would later reunite at Rush Medical College at the University of Chicago. This hunch is decisively supported by a song which appears in Martha’s collection of unpublished poems. It is titled *For Carrie Slaght* and was intended to be set to the tune of “Jingle Bells.”

Martha graduated with a Bachelor of Philosophy degree on June 15, 1910. The ceremony was held at First Baptist Church of Kalamazoo. It opened with music by Bach and concluded with Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata. Though some allowance might be for sentimentality, Martha’s poetry shows that she loved her alma mater and treasured the opportunities it afforded her.¹⁷ For instance, here is a short excerpt from one of her poems:

“Thou didst receive us as we were, Kazoo

With all of youths defects

Oft loathe work,

And prone to shirk

What duty stern directs

Yet thou hast offered free to all, Kazoo

A treasure house of truth”

Martha’s Alma Mater did not forget her and, in 1945, conferred an honorary degree of humane letters on her. Martha was one of three students in the Class of 1910 to receive an honorary degree from Kalamazoo, the others being Maynard Owen Williams (1888-1963), a noted

¹⁶ Cronkhite worked among the Kachins and Pwo Karen in Burma.

¹⁷ Some examples can be seen in the poetry provided in Appendix A.

National Geographic correspondent, and Floyd Cleveland Wilcox (1886-1958), the third president of Shimer College in Chicago, Illinois. Reviewing the rest of the Class of 1910, we find numerous elementary school teachers, a World War I Sargent, a few lawyers, and a missionary doctor.

Returning To New York (1910-1913)

After graduating from Kalamazoo College, Martha returned to Steuben County to work on the faculty of Northside High School for two years. We know little about this period in Martha's life which extends until the time she attended Rush Medical College in Chicago.

University of Chicago (1913-1916)

In 1913, Martha enrolled in Rush Medical College in Chicago, a school regarded "among the nation's largest and most distinguished medical schools. It was affiliated with the University of Chicago from 1898-1942. The college was named in the honour of Benjamin Rush (1746-1813), a physician and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.



*Photograph #5: A postcard picture of Rush Medical College's hospital building in 1913, the year Martha began attending.*¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, Martha did not attend Rush alone--her friend Carrie Estella Slaght, was there. In December 1913, Martha's residence is listed as "5531 Kimbark Avenue," an address which lies between the University of Chicago campus and Hyde Park.¹⁹ In July 1914, World War I broke out, no doubt capturing Martha's attention and weighing heavily on her future plans, and the conflict did not end until well after Martha graduated.

The class of 1916, Martha's class, was very close-knit. In 1916, when the professor Henry Baird Favill (1860-1916) died, representatives of the class wrote a very personalized resolution stating that they expressed their deep grief. The resolution opened with these words: "Whereas, Almighty God in his infinite goodness and mercy has called from this world our beloved friend and teacher."

Martha graduated in June 1916, receiving a *Doctor of Medicine* degree. This feat must be regarded as remarkable feat, especially since even as late as the 1930s, only 4.4% of medical doctors were female.

The New England Hospital for Women and Children (1916)

For half of 1916, Martha interned at the *New England Hospital for Women and Children*, at the time was located in Boston, Massachusetts. It was the first hospital in New England operated by and for women, and only the second in the country. The hospital opened its doors in 1862 and

¹⁸ From <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~stsue/unonius.html>.

¹⁹ Some individuals who shared the address at various points in the twentieth century include Robert L. Nicholson (d. 1985), a noted professor of history emeritus at University of Chicago--remembered as "a careful medieval scholar," and the chemist Erwin F. Scherubel (b. 1879).

eventually expanded to provide integrated care, currently as the *Dimock Center* in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

There were seventeen other interns at the hospital in 1916. Martha focused in on maternity work—an excellent preparation for her career in Burma. She would use her training extensively in less than ideal situations.

A Call to Burma

Being well prepared for work as a physician through a solid education and an internship, Martha did not wait long before launching her missionary career. In fact, by the next year, she sailed off to Burma.

Burma was very much a “land of promise” for American Baptists in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It was their first overseas mission. The prolific labours of Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) and his contemporaries in the Buddhist country laid a solid foundation for years to come and made Burma an important center for American Baptist missionary activity. Judson sailed for Burma as a Congregationalist, but arrived in 1813 with Baptist convictions. He and his wife Ann (1789-1826) did not receive any help from America until 1816.²⁰

Judson was optimistic about the overarching success of the work but fully realized that he may never live to see a single convert. Even so, with such potentially deferred hopes, he observed that he wouldn’t trade his station in life for that of a king! This remarkable faith allowed him to labour stridently for nine years before he saw the first nineteen converts. It is hard to overestimate the rich legacy the Judson’s left for Martha’s generation. This is reflected in the

²⁰ Adoniram had three marriages: Ann died in 1826, and he married Sarah in 1834. Sarah died in 1845 and in 1846, he married Emily.

success of the work in Burma, the way Judson's work helped create national organization in American Baptist life, and also in the plethora of namesakes which followed.²¹



*Photograph #6: A portrait of Adoniram Judson from a painting by Chester Harding (1846).*²²

By 1900 the Baptists could lay claim to nearly 50,000 members in Burma. Fast forwarding to 1916, we find a year of “progress both in evangelistic and education lines” in spite of difficulties due to financial losses and staff depletion. In general, World War I greatly increased the cost of missionary work in Burma.

In May 1917, just a century after the mission in Burma began, the ground was broken for Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital in Moulmein, which is where Martha served. The hospital was named after Dr. Ellen “Nellie” Mitchell (1829-1901), who had been a Civil War nurse who left for Burma in 1879 at the age of fifty. She served as the first female missionary doctor in Burma and

²¹ For examples of namesakes, see: Judson Press, Judson College, SS Adoniram Judson (World War II), “Judsonia, Arkansas,” Judson University, and many Baptist churches with “Judson” in their name.

²² This portrait is in the public domain.

died in Moulmein in 1901. The construction of the hospital was sponsored by money raised within the local Mon community.²³ The rear of the site overlooked a Buddhist pagoda.²⁴ One observer, watching the sunlight shimmer off the pagoda, exclaimed: “What a contrast—‘The Light of Asia’ and ‘The Light of the World’.”

That December Martha sailed off for Burma, sent by the *American Baptist Foreign Mission Society* under the umbrella of the *Women’s American Baptist Foreign Mission Society*.²⁵ At the time China, India, and Burma were the most active mission fields the society maintained. Though it was a time of scarcity in missionary candidates, other American Baptist women were sent to Burma at that time, such as Nona G. Finney, Ethel L. Hunt, Carrie E. Hesseltine (a native of Colorado who taught at the girl’s school in Moulmein), Maud Kinnaman, and Lilly Ryden (who married James Lee Lewis and stayed in Burma until 1931).²⁶

Going to Burma would be risky. Martha certainly heard harrowing stories of Adoniram Judson’s torture and imprisonment. In fact, Martha would come to see a dear friend and co-worker struck by senseless violence. Martha’s nurse, Selma Maxville, was kidnapped and murdered. We must also keep in mind the general climate of the times--Martha sailed to Burma well before World War I ended and there were submarines patrolling the oceans. The threat of physical violence was not the only menacing cloud lingering over Martha’s plans. There was also a significant risk of illness. Readers will certainly cringe upon reading Ann Judson’s visceral account

²³ The Mons, also known as the Talaings, are a stateless lowland people presently numbered at about 1 million living in Burma and Thailand.

²⁴ A pagoda is a tiered tower used throughout East Asia. It carries religious significance in Buddhism and Taoism.

²⁵ The president of the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society at the time was Emory William Hunt (1862-1938), who later became the president of Bucknell University.

²⁶ For more information about Lilly Ryden, see *Letters from Burma: An Account of the Missionary Work of Dr. and Mrs. James Lee Lewis, 1916-1931* (Minneapolis: M. L. Lindskog, 1993).

of falling victim to cerebral meningitis. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society records show that the year before Martha left for Burma, Clarence Appleton Kirkpatrick (d. 1916)—an American Baptist medical missionary who had been sent to Burma in 1912—died of typhoid fever.

The Work in Burma Begins (1917-1924)

The hospital in Moulmein was ready for use in August 1918, a few months before World War I ended. The hospital accepted both paying and non-paying patients. Martha began to put her “exceptionally fine training” to work alongside Selma Maxville (an American nurse) and Ma Hla Yin (a Mon nurse). Nurse training courses were initiated immediately. A review of Baptist missionary literature of the era reveals that it was believed that once there was a trained nurse in every village, Christ’s message would be understood more perfectly. Initially the hospital was only open to women but eventually it received men as well.

Martha’s medical philosophy is well summed up by a comment she gave in an interview later in her life: “I believe in thoroughness and exactness in medicine. Physicians must meet the needs of their patients and must put themselves in the place of patients. They must have sympathy for people as well as training in medicine.” She also believed that medical service should be extended “to all who come,” regardless of their specific situations. Due to her generous attitude and her prominent position, the work Martha was called to could be unpredictable. There is one account where the infant child of an American missionary who was born some eight hundred miles away lost her mother. Someone brought the child three hundred miles to Sagaing to meet Martha, who dropped all her work and travelled five hundred miles to care for the child.

On the mission field, Martha spoke Burmese and Hindustani.²⁷ In Moulmein, Martha found a great diversity of races, cultures, and financial situations. As many as 15 races were found among the hospital's patients. Martha also found that "as in the days of the Great Physician there have been all manner of diseases."



Photograph #7: A photo showing a building on the south side of Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital, apparently showing the laundry building.²⁸

The hospital did not merely pursue medical work. In contrast to those who held to the "social gospel" teachings which began to emerge in Baptist life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the workers of the hospital were very concerned with personal and individual salvation. One report that Martha gave suggests that the nurses strongly believed that true repentance and the acceptance of forgiveness were non-negotiable when it came to being considered a Christian. They preached Christ vigorously and at one point Martha noted that "a goodly number from heathen villages have listened to the old, old story, which was new to them as if it had all happened two days instead of two thousand years ago!"

²⁷ Hindustani is a colloquial language which is a mixture of Hindi and Urdu.

²⁸ This photo is from the files of Cindy Fraher. It is used with permission.

In speaking of her care of sick children, Martha asked that her supporters pray that she may "give the children a training of both heart and hand which shall win them and their parents to a true allegiance to the Master." Each morning, Miss Maxwell led the patients in a short time of Bible study and devotion. It is clear that Miss Maxwell, though a nurse, was also an apt leader, not only supervising the work of the workers in an executive capacity, but also showing an interest in their spiritual welfare.

Reports delivered in this period demonstrate Martha's piety. One writer stated that her "whole life...is a wonderful illustration of how God has led a quiet, unassuming country girl, who had surrendered herself to absolute faith in a high ideal, to victory through a realization of her dream for service." However, she was not so heavenly minded that she was no earthly good—a review of her activities clearly shows that her actions backed up her words.

By 1920, Martha was appointed to be the medical officer at the Susan Haswell Leper Home in Moulmein. The hospital came into existence in the late 1890s and takes its name from Susan Haswell, an American Baptist missionary who founded it along with Dr. Ellen Mitchell and M. Elizabeth Carr.²⁹



Photograph #8: A recent photo of a man reading a newspaper at the leper home in Moulmein.³⁰

Baptist missionaries established seven similar centers for leprosy patients in the Congo, India, and Burma. By the early 1900s, the one in Moulmein was treating over 50 patients a year. From 1920 onward, Martha visited the hospital frequently, eventually at least once a week. It

²⁹ Susan, or “Mama Susie” as she was known to her Burmese friends, was born and raised in Burma and is an eminent founder of important institutions in Moulmein. She founded a girl’s high school, an orphanage, and the leper home. In fact, it was Susan Haswell’s encouragement which brought Ellen Mitchell to Burma in the first place.

³⁰ Photo by Jeroen de Bakker for The Myanmar project. Dutch documentary photographer Jeroen de Bakker photographs the Leprosy hospital and colony in Moulmein for The Myanmar Project. The project wants to show what 60 years of brutal military dictatorship has done with Myanmar and its people. Learn more at www.themyanmarproject.com. Used with the photographer’s permission.

exists to this day and treats about 200 patients, with a couple thousands disabled people and amputees living in and around the hospital.

In 1922, Dr. Anna Barbara Grey from Illinois joined Martha in the work at Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital, serving there and at other locations in Burma and India until she retired in 1957.³¹

James R. Gifford

James R. Gifford, one of the leading and most highly respected farmers of Hornby, died at his home Sunday afternoon at 2:45 o'clock, following an attack of apoplexy with which he was stricken early Sunday morning.

Mr. Gifford was born in Troupsburg and would have celebrated his 77th birthday next month. He moved to Hornby in 1865 with his parents, Eliza (Adams) and Joseph Gifford and had made his home there ever since. His entire life was devoted to farming and he was widely known. He had many friends in Corning and vicinity.

On February 23, 1870 he was married to Miss Alice Coyle of Hornby who survives with their five children, Mrs. Sylvester Roloson and Mrs. Emmett Roys of Corning, Dr. Martha J. Gifford who is in charge of the Ellen Mitchel Memorial Hospital in Moulmein, Lurma, India; Alva C. and Joseph L. Gifford, both of Hornby. He also leaves one sister, Miss Mary E. Gifford of Hornby.

A prayer service will be held in the home at 1:30 o'clock Wednesday afternoon and the funeral will be held in the Congregational church at Hornby Forks at 2 o'clock. Burial will be made in the cemetery at Hornby Forks.

Photograph #9: A copy of Martha's father's obituary from 1923.³²

³¹ Grey was also a graduate from Rush Medical College and also interned at the New England Hospital for Women and Children. Her grandfather was the Chicago banking magnate and philanthropist, Charles F. Grey.

By 1924, Martha was on furlough. Perhaps she had returned the previous October for her father's funeral. In any case, in October 1924 she visited the Women's Missionary Union of South Avenue Baptist Church in Rochester, New York, and in April 1925 she spoke at the Baptist church in Odessa, New York.³³ We can safely assume that there were numerous speaking arrangements in between these two dates. Martha's public profile was beginning to emerge and she continued to fill her time of furlough with speaking engagements.

India (1925-1928)

In 1925 or later, Martha was in India. She served at Women's Jubilee Hospital in Gauhati. She also studied at the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine. The school had been founded in 1914 by Leonard Rogers (1868-1962) with the mission of carrying out "research, post-graduate teaching, training, investigation and treatment in tropical diseases." Rogers is perhaps best known for pioneering the treatment of cholera with hypertonic saline. At the time Martha attended, the school was directed by John W. D. Megan and offered a Diploma in Tropical Medicine, which Martha presumably received before 1927.

From 1927 to 1928, Martha served at the Satribari Christian Hospital in Guwahati. The institution had been established in 1926. Martha relieved the previous doctor, Esther Clossen, who had to leave on account of ill health.³⁴ Martha "worked vehemently" at this hospital.

³² This image is from *The Evening Leader* (Corning, New York) October 23, 1923. It is used with permission from Tom Tryniski's www.fultonhistory.com.

³³ South Avenue Baptist Church was founded in 1885. Odessa Baptist Church was founded in 1841.

³⁴ It appears that Esther went on to become a physician in Tucson, Arizona by the 1930s and director of the Tucson health department by the 1950s.

Martha left India when it became “necessary” to return to Burma for some undisclosed reason, likely the pressing needs of Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital in Moulmein. Satribari Christian Hospital still exists to this day and employs five doctors.

Back to Burma (1928-1930)

Martha returned to Burma in 1928, as one of three doctors on site. Grace R. Seagrave (d. 1951) had joined the team in 1926.³⁵ Grace stayed at the hospital until the early 1940s when she began serve elsewhere in Burma and India. In a 1929 report about the work at the hospital, Martha said: “To say that we have been busy is to use a word very much overworked but it is impossible to describe the year at the E. M. M. Hospital and leave the word out.” She went on to describe the proportions of her work, receiving 2700 appeals from sick people in the previous year and caring for 650 people who had stays of a few days or more.

Another year passed and Martha wrote in 1930 that “the year has brought little to distinguish it from previous years. Busy days...work out of proportion to workers.” She had a healthy optimism, one which was similar to that of the Baptist missionary hero, Adoniram Judson.³⁶ This angle of Martha’s disposition is well summarized by a line in her report: “We thank God and take courage.”

³⁵ Grace was the sister of Dr. Gordon Stifler Seagrave (1897-1965), a John Hopkins Medical School graduate who founded a hospital in Namkham, Burma. Grace and Gordon were great-grandchildren of the Justus (1806-1858) and Calista Vinton, prolific early missionaries to Burma. Gordon knew Martha and is well-known for having authored a memoir, *Burma Surgeon*. Gordon was put on trial in Burma during 1950-1951 for treason. For more information about the trial, see Kenton Clymer, *The Trial for High Treason of the “Burma Surgeon,”* Gordon S. Seagrave in *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 81, No. 2 May 2012 (University of California Press, 2012), 245-291.

³⁶ Judson is popularly quoted as saying “The prospects are bright as the promises of God.”



Photograph #10: A hand-made lambrequin for a clock shelf from Burma. It was donated to the Hornby Historical Museum by Martha Gifford.³⁷

The hospital received enough paying patients to cover its expenses. Many enhancements were made to the hospital since the time it opened, including running water, electric lights, and an electric refrigerator. An X-ray machine was installed and over 180 pictures were taken, improving their ability to treat patients. That said, the machine also became a source of frequent problems and repairs due to the ambient dampness in the environment.

Though Martha kept busy, she took time to pause and take in the beauty of the land which surrounded her. In an undated poem titled *On Viewing a Moulein Sunset*, Martha ties the beauty of her surroundings into the love and presence of God:

"Come into my soul, O Beauty

Shine in with thy gleams of gold.

Shine in with the warmth and gladness

³⁷ This photograph was taken Susan Moore at the Hornby Museum. It is used with permission.

Thy bright rays ever hold.

Come into my soul, O Beauty

And fill it with rosy cheer,

The light that makes me know truly

A loving God is near".

The Work in Burma Continues (1930-1941)

In the early 1930s the Scottish-born Robert Halliday (1864-1933) was ministering among the Mon.³⁸ He was a fatherly figure and is mentioned in Martha's reports. Though his work could be frustrating at times, it met with numerical success and he even told of one occasion where there were thirty-five baptisms in two months. He observed that the "natives will be not be won by harshly crying down Buddhism, or the religion of their ancestors...There is no weapon that touches the heart and conscience as the story of redemption through the blood of [Christ's] cross." He also paid tribute to the evangelistic work done at the Ellen Mitchel Memorial Hospital, which had recently led to the conversion of three girls. Though he was very busy with evangelism, Halliday was also a scholar of note. He earned the title of "the father of Mon studies," and was a prolific translator and author.³⁹

Sadly, by 1933, Martha had stopped writing reports for the Burma Baptist Missionary Conference. While we can review reports filed by others such as Dr. Anna Grey, we lose a first-

³⁸ The "Mon" people are a distinct ethnic group in Moulmein. Halliday ministered among the Mon for the first three decades of the twentieth century.

³⁹ He left behind a body of works as diverse as a translation of the Old Testament, a Mon-English dictionary, and translations of Burmese mythology/poetry.

hand perspective on events at the hospital. 1933 brought a “depression” to many of the hospitals in Burma, and the proportion of non-paying patients increased. Nevertheless, the hospital managed to stay out of debt. Soon controversy erupted connected to a report the Layman’s Commission on Foreign Missions gave on the work in Burma, and many of the mission enterprises came under intense criticism. Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital, however, received praise for its work.

By the fall of 1933, Martha was on furlough again and spoke at places such as the Calvary Mission in Manistique, Michigan and First Baptist Church in Bradford, Pennsylvania. She remained on furlough until 1935.



Photograph #11: A student application photo of Harriet (Gibbens) Acheson from the 1930s.⁴⁰

In 1937, Harriet Gibbens (1907-1997) joined the hospital as a nurse. Miss Gibbens was the daughter of missionaries to Burma and came the year before. She later became Harriet Acheson. Good nurses were critical to success on the medical mission and “added greatly” to efficiency.

⁴⁰ This image was taken by an unknown photographer and is in the public domain. It was obtained from The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives of The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions.



Photograph #12: Posing with a new car. Martha is second from right and Selma Maxville is third from right.⁴¹

In November 1937, Martha wrote to her supporters about a new car the mission received, a “very fine gift indeed.” It was highly appreciated and the mission put on a “dedicatory program” that even had a formal order of services. Martha enjoyed the new car, finding it a blessing. She asked for prayers that it would help make the mission “a greater blessing to a greater number of people.” She also noted that it drove smoothly, even “obeying [her] wishes like an old friend.”

Martha’s letter also shows that her support base in the United States of America was substantial. She appreciated the 150 individuals and organizations on her list of donors.⁴² She

⁴¹ This photo is from the files of Cindy Fraher. It is used with permission.

noted that her supporters included not only people from her home congregation, but also those from other Baptist churches and even other denominations.⁴³ She also observed that some of her supporters did not belong to any church, registering a desire that they join a church someday.

The Invasion of Burma and its Aftermath (1941-1945)



Photograph #13: A photo taken from a Japanese bomber which shows an aerial view of the bombing of Rangoon.⁴⁴

In December 1941, less than a week after Pearl Harbour, Japan invaded Burma and occupied it until 1945. Rangoon, the capital of Burma, was bombed two days before Christmas. Well over half of Burma was conquered by May 1942. More than 300,000 civilians, including the entire hospital staff, were evacuated to India. The evacuation was a huge operation fraught with peril and hardship. It has been described as “heavy lifting” and an event of “industrial scale.” Many

⁴² Support came in various ways, not always directly for Martha. For instance, North Baptist Church in Corning, New York sewed for the hospital. There is also a record of the Women’s Missionary Society at the Baptist Church in Savona, New York sending box of supplies which included 20 pads, 1,100 square wipers, 12 sheets, Turkish towels, and soap.

⁴³ An example of this would be a thank you note Martha sent for a gift from First United Baptist Church in Lowell, Massachusetts.

⁴⁴ This photo is from John Tewell’s Flickr account. It is used here under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 2.0 Generic license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>). The image has not been changed, except for scaling adjustments.

evacuees died in Northern Burma. The journey from the northern parts of Burma into India was up to 300 miles long, and well over 4,000 people died of sickness, starvation, malnutrition, and drowning. So infamous was one 122-mile jungle trek that it became known as “The Road of Death.”

We do not have any details about Martha’s path to India, but there is reason to believe she was able to beat the main rush of refugees. We may speculate that she experienced significant difficulty along the way, but ultimately arrived safely in India. There, Martha got right to work alongside Dr. Alice Randall (1896-1956) at the fifty-bed American Baptist women’s hospital in Guwahati.⁴⁵

At the hospital in Guwahati, Martha saw the refuge situation as a ministry opportunity, with the Burmese refuges being “the most forlorn, wretched group of human beings [she had] ever seen.” She cared for Burmese refuges there until 1943. A window into Martha’s perspective on the refugees is provided in an undated poem she wrote while caring for the refuges.⁴⁶ It exhibits a vivid consciousness of the plight of the refugees and her feeling of responsibility for them, and then provides a call to action:

“Oh, let us all live by the side of some road

Where the sons of want go by

They are suffering from pain

They are suffering from sin”

⁴⁵ Dr. Randall was British-born and lived in Charleston, West Virginia. She served in India for two terms: 1929-1946 and 1949-1953.

⁴⁶ The poem is reproduced in its entirety in Appendix B as “By The Side of the Road—Refugees.”



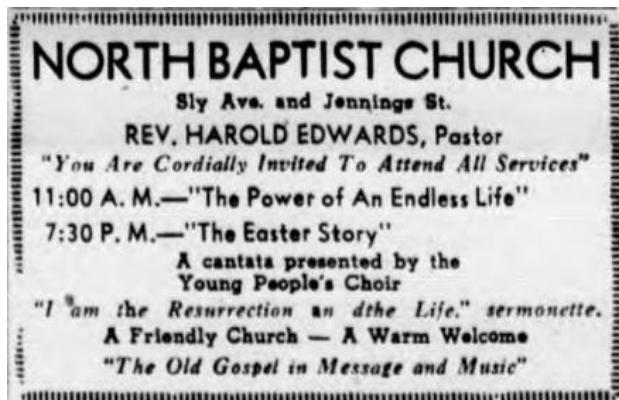
Photograph #14: An undated photo of John Everett Clough.⁴⁷

Later, Martha served at the Clough Memorial Hospital in Ongole. The hospital was named after John Everett Clough (1836-1910) who established a Baptist mission in Ongole and is well known for leading what might have been one of the largest mass baptisms ever to take place in Baptist history.⁴⁸

In June 1943, Martha left for a furlough--a time largely filled with speaking engagements, though she also used her time to do some medical work at the University of Pennsylvania. As mentioned earlier, even though we don't know exactly when Martha joined North Baptist Church in Corning, New York, we do know she was a member by the early 1940s.

⁴⁷ This photo is in the public domain and comes from John Everett and Emma Rauschenbusch Clough, *Social Christianity in the Orient; the story of a man, a mission and a movement* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1914).

⁴⁸ John received an honorary Doctor of Divinity from Martha's Alma Mater, Kalamazoo College.



Photographs #15 and 16: Advertisements for North Baptist Church from 1952.⁴⁹

James N. Bedford (d. 1978) was Martha's pastor in the early 1940s. Bedford was a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, Houghton College, and Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1945 he went on to become President of London Bible Institute in London, Ontario, Canada and remained there until 1954.⁵⁰ When Bedford left North Baptist to lead that institution, it appears that Harold Edwards may have taken over as pastor. Edwards was known for his "unassuming and gracious manner." Whether or not he immediately succeeded Bedford, it is clear Edwards had the

⁴⁹ These images are from the *Evening Leader* (Corning, New York) January 26, 1952 and April 12, 1952. They are used with permission from Tom Tryniski's excellent newspaper archive site, www.fultonhistory.com.

⁵⁰ London Bible Institute merged with another institution to create Ontario Bible College, which was later part of a merger which created Tyndale College and Seminary. He would also take up a pastorate in Detroit, Michigan and teach at Detroit Bible College.

pastorate in the 1950s and 1960s, until he too would leave for Ontario, Canada, taking up a pastorate in North Bay, Ontario. All evidence available suggests that North Baptist Church was very enthusiastic about foreign missions and the congregation became an important source of support for Martha's endeavours.

In October 1943 Martha spoke at World Parish Day at First Baptist Church of Belvidere, Illinois. In December she spoke at the Corning Women's Community club as well as a Christmas party hosted by the Corning Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She also went on a speaking tour arranged by the Northern Baptist Convention. In February 1944, she spoke at a number of churches in New York State, including Memorial Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, Tabernacle Baptist Church in Utica, and First Baptist Church of Watervliet. At the School of Missions in Morrisville, New York, she told harrowing stories of Japanese planes in the skies and mothers and children so weak that they could not move. She also filled "many engagements" in New Hampshire during March, including First Baptist Church in Nashua and People's Baptist Church in Portsmouth, a black Baptist Church where Martin Luther King Jr. would preach eight years later. As the year progressed, Martha gave various talks in New York State and Pennsylvania. For instance, she delivered a talk to the Hi-Roadian class of Painted Post Baptist Church in July and one at the Women's Missionary Baptist Society of Pennsylvania gathering in New Castle, Pennsylvania in October. In July 1945 *Let's Go Back to Mandalay*, a hymn Martha wrote, was performed at the William L. Keyser Missionary Society of East End Baptist Church in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

Back To Burma (1945-1950)

Emerging out from under Japanese occupation in 1945, the Burmese government requested that

Martha return to Moulmein to re-establish Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital—a testament to her effectiveness and also that of the hospital. She sailed for Burma at that time. If we may speculate a bit, it may have been to Martha's surprise. She returned promptly and found that the hospital was occupied by the Japanese, who had destroyed the building thoroughly.⁵¹ With rigorous effort, the building was restored. In 1946, Martha worked with two doctors, Anna B. Grey and Grace Seagrave.

From at least 1949-1953, Martha was a member of the International Leprosy Association. Martha's national profile was quite significant in Baptist circles at this point. Though she did quite a few speaking activities on her own, some presentations were performed by others. For instance, in October 1950, at First Baptist Church of Iola, Kansas, a place—as far as we know—Martha never went, Mrs. G. D. Caldwell gave sketch of Martha's life.

Tragedy in Burma (1950-1952)

The early 1950s brought hardship to American missions in Burma. In February 1950 Martha's co-worker, the 67 year old Miss Selma Maxville, was kidnapped and murdered. This event began a sad chapter in the history of Baptist missions in Moulmein, Burma.

⁵¹ There is reason to believe that Martha went back to Burma with Mr. and Mrs. Walter Keyser.



Photograph #17: An undated photo of Selma Maxville, Martha's co-worker, who was murdered in Burma.⁵²

Selma had recently left Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital and was working as a nurse in the interior when she was kidnapped by Mon bandits near her home south of Moulmein. Even though she spoke the Mon language and was known for her work among the poor (she was affectionately known by locals affectionately as “mama”), she was singled out for attack due to her evangelism. Selma’s captors demanded 20,000 rupees, an amount which the American government and the mission society refused to pay based on a strict policy of not paying ransoms. Selma disappeared for ten days until her location was discovered and a rescue party made up of Mon villagers was formed with the intent of rescuing her. The rescue party met initial success and found Selma badly wounded. They began transporting her to a hospital on an ox-cart.

⁵² This photo is from <http://internationalministries.org/read/44582> and is reproduced with written assurance that it is not under copyright from Laura Timmel of *American Baptist International Ministries*.

However, along the way the group was attacked by the kidnappers who proceeded to kill twelve of the rescuers, eleven Buddhists and one Muslim--as well as Selma. She was buried in Moulmein.

The period of tumult did not end with Selma's death. In September 1950, Dr. Gordon S. Seagrave (1897-1965) was arrested. He was an acquaintance of Martha and the brother of Grace Seagrave, who had previously worked at Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital. Gordon was alleged to have committed treason in assisting Karen tribesmen in their rebellion against the Burmese government. His trial before Burma's Supreme Court began in 1950 and continued into 1951. Grace was left to care for his hospital, a responsibility which taxed her disposition and eventually led to her death at age 56.

Eventually, Gordon Seagrave's name was cleared and the government allowed him to return to his hospital. The hospital benefited from the publicity, but the ordeal took a heavy toll on the Seagraves and perhaps reduced optimism among missionaries in Burma. Gordon died of a heart ailment in March 1965. His legacy is reflected in a statement made in 1961 by the late President of the United States, John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), who said that Gordon was "a symbol to the entire world of the American tradition of humanitarian service abroad." A memoir he wrote, *Burma Surgeon*, which was written several years before he was arrested, show him to be an interesting, driven, passionate, and opinionated individual.

In 1950, a new doctor came to Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital. Dr. Dorothy G. Gates (d. 2013) had been a medical missionary in China, but was forced to leave due to a Communist takeover there. She worked at Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital from 1950 until 1962 when there was a military coup in Burma. She was similar to Martha in a few ways. She lived into her nineties, but was never married. She was described as "was brilliant, kind, and selfless."

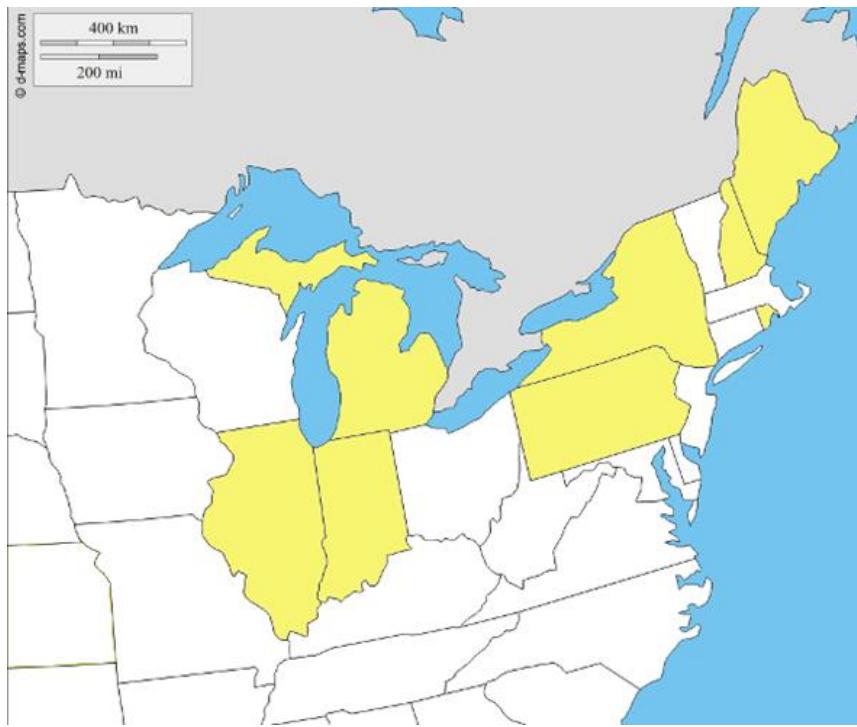
In 1952, Martha was in the United States again. She had a busy speaking schedule which took her to New England. In August, she spoke at the United Baptist Mission Society of New Hampshire, which was held at the Kimball Union Academy, a private boarding school in Meriden.⁵³ In September she spoke at the Fall Basket Meeting held for the women of Lewiston United Baptist Church in Lewiston, Maine. In November, she participated in the first interracial session in the 127-year history of the Rhode Island Baptist Convention. It was held at Wakefield Baptist Church in Wakefield, Rhode Island and the topic was “The World Prospect of the Christian Faith.” In December she spoke at Memorial Baptist Church in Cortland, New York.

Retirement and Her Death (1953-1982)

Before December 1952, Martha’s furlough turned into a retirement. It was not uncommon for missionaries to have one final furlough period immediately before they retired. Her age was likely a serious factor in her decision. She worked hard in Burma, with little rest—we know of only four periods of furlough in Martha’s missionary career of nearly forty years. And her furloughs were by no means idle. Her furlough schedule was frequently filled with speaking opportunities—touring American Baptist churches in the Eastern and Midwestern states, an endeavour which brought her to at least eight states.⁵⁴

⁵³ The school was founded in 1813.

⁵⁴ See photography #14. There are records of talks given in New York, Pennsylvania, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana. This paper mentions 20 specific churches she spoke at.



Photograph #18: An illustration of which states Martha is known to have given talks in (coloured in yellow).⁵⁵

It is likely that the death of Selma Maxville and the undertones of the climate of the Seagrave ordeal was an even greater factor in her decision to retire. Selma had been the one to greet Martha when she arrived in Burma. The two ladies were “close friends” and Martha’s friends and relatives said it was a “hard blow” for Martha. Another potential influence to be considered is Martha’s relatives--who made it known that they were concerned for her safety.

Martha didn’t turn into a recluse when she retired and remained active in public speaking. In September 1953, she spoke at the annual Fall Meeting of the Women’s Baptist Missionary Society of Ontario-Yates Counties in New York State and at the Baptist Women’s Fellowship at First Baptist Church of Manlius. In September 1954, she gave various talks, including one at First Baptist Church of Wellsboro, Pennsylvania, one on “The Great Physician in Burma” at

⁵⁵ This image is a modified version of the map found here: http://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=5222&lang=en. It is used with permission.

Waverly Baptist Church in Waverly, New York, and another at a Women's Mission Society supper at First Baptist Church of Penn Yan, New York.



Photograph #19: An undated photo of Martha taken at an unknown location.⁵⁶

Over a decade later, in 1965, Martha spoke at First Baptist Church in Terre Haute, Indiana, which is her last known speaking arrangement. At some point during or before 1960, Martha moved to Terre Haute to care for the kids of her nephew Loyal Gifford Sr. (1919-1999) after his wife Clare became ill.⁵⁷ She "organized the kids" and "gave all jobs to do." There is a record of Martha being visited by her sister Ethel in Terre Haute in 1960. Martha's record in the United States Social Security Index indicates she received her Social Security Number in Indiana, and there is no record of Martha living in Indiana at any other point in her life.

⁵⁶ This photo is from the personal files of Cindy Fraher. It is used with permission.

⁵⁷ Loyal was the son of Joseph Gifford and had eight children: John, Leroy, David, Loyal Jr., Leslie, Albert, Dorothy, and Clare.

In 1967, Martha was in Fairport in Monroe County, New York. Her sister Ethel B. Roys (1884-1990) lived there. Martha may have been there to care for her sister, or perhaps more likely, to be cared for by her. In 1973, Ethel entered *Fairport Baptist Homes*, an American Baptist retirement home, and even celebrated her one-hundredth birthday there in 1985.⁵⁸ Both Martha and Ethel stayed in the “Health Related Facility” or “Immediate Care Facility” area, which as of 1973 had 196 beds. In the late 1980s, which was after Martha died, Fairport Baptist Homes built 42 independent living units as well.

By March 1982, Martha was totally deaf and being cared for by Ethel. A review of the death dates of individuals listed in this paper makes it clear that Martha outlived many of her contemporaries. Martha was still at the Fairport Homes in April 1982, and died there at the full age of 95. Garth Brokaw, a chaplain who visited Martha on her last evening, recalls her saying “sometimes I don’t know where I am...sometimes I don’t know who I am...sometimes I don’t know why I am, but I will tell you one thing, God is so good...I just wish that good God would come and take this old sheep home.”

In an undated and unidentified obituary article clipping, we read:

“Dr. Martha Gifford, 95, of 4646 Nine Mile Point Rd, Fairport, N.Y., formerly of Hornby, died Wednesday, April 21, 1982 in St. Mary’s Hospital, Rochester. She was born in Hornby Aug. 25, 1886 to James and Alice Coye Gifford. She was a graduate of Northside Highschool, Kalamazoo College in Michigan and Rush Medical School in Chicago. She served in the mission field 35 years in Burma and related countries. Survivors are a sister, Ethel B. Roys of Fairport, and several nieces and nephews. Calling hours will be Friday 7-9pm and Saturday, 10-11 a.m. In Phillips Funeral

⁵⁸ Starting in 1968, Alvin C. Foster (1925-2006) was the administrator, and later the president. The assistant administrator at the time was Garth Brokaw, who went on to lead the ministry for 21 years before retiring. He has fond memories of Martha and mentioned that he counts Dr. Gifford “as one who helped shape my thirty two year ministry with elders.”

Home, Painted Post, Service will be held there Saturday at 11 following hours. Rev., Jack Long officiating.”⁵⁹

As the obituary mentions, Martha's funeral was held at Phillips Funeral Home in Corning, New York and conducted by Jack Long, the pastor of Painted Post Baptist Church.⁶⁰ Martha was buried in Central Valley Cemetery in Hornby, New York.

Dr. Gifford's Legacy

Martha exhibited “tremendous strength of character” and ‘tremendous determination.’ One can only imagine the reserves of strength required, for instance, for a young woman of the early 1900s to sail over to a remote and little understood country to face many dangers, challenges, and unknowns. One article called her energy “inexhaustible.” And then there was her ability to persevere through many challenging years of service! Where did Martha's strength come from? Certainly she would have pointed to dependence on God as her source of strength.

Martha vividly shows us the importance and power of prayer. After recounting a patient's struggle with typhoid, a disease which had claimed many patients and a few missionary workers, Martha asks “who, after this struggle and this victory, can doubt the value of ardent, sympathetic prayer?” In conjunction with her inclination to pray was her recognition that prayer flowed out of her own insufficiency. She saw her limits as a doctor, and said that “unlike the Great Physician we cannot heal them.” And yet, even in recognizing this insufficiency, through prayer she was optimistic about her missionary endeavours, realizing that a recourse remained-- “still we can pray that every life that touches ours may get there from some good, something which, while it may not make them every whit whole, will send them away richer than when they came.”

⁵⁹ This clipping comes from the person files of Cindy Fraher.

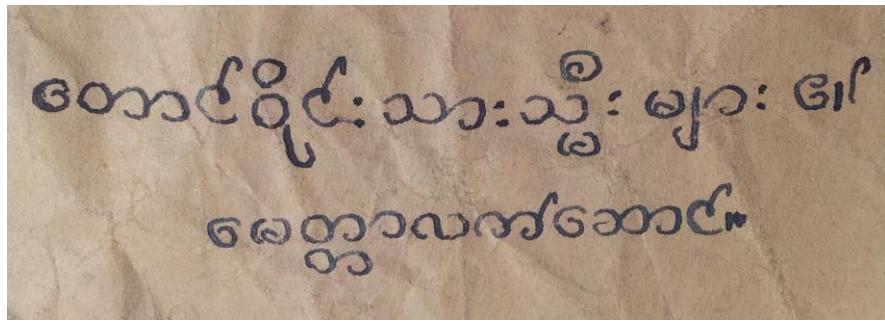
⁶⁰ Irene Sutherland, one of the cofounders of the funeral home, was the first female funeral director in New York State.

Martha didn't seem to have an over-spiritualized view which overemphasizes the power of prayer and underemphasizes or neglects the importance of working hard. In one report, she attributed success to "work plus prayer." Martha models for us a healthy balanced perspective, which is ever critical in times of competing priorities. She exhibited a zeal for caring for the physical needs of people she was ministering to, and yet was unable to abandon consideration of their spiritual needs, and the need for them to hear the gospel, believe, and be baptized. "God's kingdom" was the grid through which she saw her vocation. It seems clear that Martha did not subscribe to the "social gospel" teachings of Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918).⁶¹ For Martha, it was both physical and spiritual needs which caused her to sail to Burma. In fact, in an interview she said that she "would not be in Moulmein purely to do medical work unless it was Christian Missionary work. If [she] wanted to do purely medical work [she would] find plenty of it to do in America under better conditions and for more money."⁶² This appears to be consistent with the general outlook of Baptists in the beginning of the twentieth century, with one publication about the work in Burma categorizing "Medical Work" as a subheading of "Evangelizing Through Other Channels." Another way of looking at it was that the medical mission's basic mandate was to "preach and heal." Running through all of her activities was the realization that everything must be done "to the glory of God," and so all activities were seen through the perspective of a greater mission and calling.⁶³

⁶¹ Rauschenbusch was an American Baptist pastor and a professor at Rochester Theological Seminary in Rochester, New York.

⁶² This point is further established in Martha's poem, *By The Side of the Road—Refugees*, in the way it refuses to divorce "pain" suffering from "sin" suffering. To Martha, they were distinct, but, on the other hand, she saw them as legitimately within the sphere of her concerns as a doctor.

⁶³ I Corinthians 10:31, from which this theological concept comes from, was a key text that was read in the Dedicatory Program for the new car the mission received in 1937.



Photograph #20: An undated handwritten note in Burmese. It read: "A gift from Taung Wine's sons and daughters." "Taung Wine" is not a person, but rather a mountain region in Moulmein.⁶⁴

Martha also models for us how to live in an environment which could be fertile ground for a complaining spirit. In face of such an environment, she possessed a truly thankful attitude. Though she does not gloss over the difficulties she faced, she evidences in her reports a pronounced thankfulness, both to God and her supporters who "warmed and cheered [her] heart." It is no surprise that Martha was featured in the comments on Proverbs 17:22 in *The Interpreter's Bible*, which was published in 1954. The King James Version renders the verse as "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones." The English Standard Version renders the beginning of the verse as "A joyful heart." Reflecting on this verse, the *Interpreter's Bible* quotes Martha as saying:

"Some [of the nurses] were convinced that cheerfulness must surely be a part of a Christian personality, especially of those who work among the suffering. Who ever knew a grumpy old grouch who 'cranks' all the time helping a sick person to get well? It is the 'merry heart [that] doeth good like a medicine,' and we decided that no matter what the circumstances, a smile three times a day and at bedtime should be a minimum in a Christian hospital. We also advised a standing order for extras to be given whenever circumstances should demand."

Martha's legacy has a strong literary side to it, perhaps harkening back to her days in college. In her personal effects there is a handwritten notebook with over twenty poems. In our

⁶⁴ This note was scanned from the personal files of Cindy Fraher.

day, books, literature, and poetry seem to be increasingly pushed to the periphery of daily existence. Martha provides us an encouraging example of a busy lady who still found time to read, correspond, keep a commonplace book, and write poetry.⁶⁵

Much more remains to be said about Martha, and hopefully more details will emerge. In reflecting on Martha's legacy, we should remember that good Christian biographies have historically played an important role in bringing mission workers to the field.⁶⁶ Perhaps Martha's story will play a small role in someone's call to the mission field. And perhaps her faithful service will inspire all of us to look more carefully at how we are using our skills and opportunities in the location where we are called. We should be grateful that we have stories of noble and faithful Christian women who spend their lives in God's service like Martha Gifford did.

⁶⁵ Examples of her poetry are provided in Appendix A.

⁶⁶ For instance, Adoniram Judson himself was inspired by the biographies written about individuals such as Christian Schwartz, David Brainerd, and John Eliot. Most Baptist missionaries who went to Burma heard stories about Adoniram Judson and were inspired by them. No doubt, this was also true of Martha.

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Appendix A – A Timeline of Key Dates in Martha Gifford’s Life

August 25, 1886 – Born in Hornby, New York.

1904 – Probable graduation from North Side High School in Corning, New York.

1907 – Entered Kalamazoo College.

June 15, 1910 – Graduated from Kalamazoo College with a Bachelor of Philosophy degree

1913 – Entered Rush Medical College at University of Chicago.

July 1914 – World War I began.

June 1916 – Graduated from Rush Medical College with a Doctor of Medicine degree.

1916 – Interned at New England Hospital for Women and Children.

May 1917 – The ground for Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital was broken.

December 1917 – Sailed for Burma.

August 1918 – Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital is ready for use.

November 1918 – World War I ended.

1920 – Martha was medical officer at Susan Haswell Leper Home in Moulmein.

May 1922 – A second doctor joins Martha: Anna Barbara Grey.

1924 – Left Burma for a period of furlough.

1925 – Arrived in India, and worked at Women’s Jubilee Hospital and studied tropical medicine in Calcutta, India.

1926 – A third Doctor comes to Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital while Martha is gone, Grace Seagrave.

1927 – Served at Satribari Christian Hospital in Guwahati, India.

1928 – Returned to Burma.

Fall 1933 – Left Burma for a period of furlough.

1935 – Returned to Burma.

1937 – Harriet Gibbens joins the Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital as a nurse.

November 1937 – The hospital receives a new car.

1939 – World War II began.

December 1941 – Japan invades Burma and Martha left to India to care for Burmese refugees at Clough Memorial Hospital.

May 1942 – Japan has conquered over half of Burma.

June 1943 – Left India for a period of furlough in the United States.

1945 – World War II ended. Burma emerges out of Japanese occupation and the government requests that Martha returns.

1946 – Returned to Burma to rebuild the hospital.

February 1950 – Martha's former nurse, Selma Maxville, is kidnapped and killed.

September 1950 – Dr. Gordon Seagrave is arrested and put to trial for treason.

August 1951 – Grace Seagrave, a former doctor at Ellen Mitchell Memorial Hospital, died of a heart condition.

1952 – Martha returned to the United States for a period of furlough. During the furlough, it appears she retired.

1960 – In Terre Haute, helping her nephew Loyal Gifford care for his kids.

1965 – Last known speaking engagement (in Terre Haute, Indiana).

1967 – Living in Fairport, New York.

1973 – Martha's older sister Ethel went to Fairport Baptist Homes.

March 1982 – Completely deaf and being cared for by her sister, Ethel, at Fairport Baptist Homes.

April 1982 – Died

Appendix B – Poetic Compositions by Martha Jane Gifford⁶⁷

I have transcribed these poems as written or printed. Unless otherwise noted in parenthesis, these poems come from the personal papers of Martha Gifford. They are reproduced “as is,” with no editing performed.

A Winter Morning Reverie

I look from my window one morning,
As the day was beginning to dawn,
And saw a beautiful carpet
Spread out o're the grassy lawn.
Then I knew that while the darkness,
Covered mountains, and valleys, and lakes
There softly had fallen from heaven

A myriad of feathery flakes.
The beauty was all unbroken
As I gazed o'er the fields away
In pure, spotted whiteness
The snowy covering lay;
I saw no spot or blemish
No human trace was there,
Nothing to mar the picture
That Nature had made so fair.

And methought that if in Nature
Such spotless beauty could be,

⁶⁷ These poems are reproduced here with permission from Cindy Fraher.

If from ev'rything discordant
Kind Nature is ever free,
Why should not the love of beauty
Expel evil thoughts from the breast,
And cause that there should be cherished
Only those that are pure and blest?

Springtime

Oh, how I love the spring time
With it's charms so manifold,
With its wondrous, wondrous beauties,
More than man has ever told
A thousand, thousand wonders
Coming every morn a new,
As I glance upon the landscape
O'er the over-arching blue.

The Message of Springtime

(printed in the May 1909 issue of *The College Index*, the newspaper of Martha' Alma Mater, Kalamazoo College)

As I strolled through the fields and meadows,

When Spring was drawing near,

A sweat and beautiful message

Was borne to my listening ear.

All Nature seemed to be waking,

A new lease of life to be taking,

And everything round me was making

Sweet sounds of gladness and cheer.

I thought, 'tis a beautiful spirit

Pervading the spring so dear,

'Tis the joyous life now awaking

That dispels our gloom and fear,

The sun in the sky brightly shining,

And giving each cloud a gold lining,

Was saying, "What need of repining,

When life is so full of good cheer?"

All Nature seemed telling the message,

In accents so sweet and so clear,

There were cadences soft in her murmurs,

Of happiness, gladness, and cheer.

The balmy spring breezes were blowing,
Their gladness in music were showing,
And the voice of the rivulet flowing,
Seemed ripples of gladness and cheer.

The brown withered leaves in the forests,
Which winter had left dry and sere,
Were dancing away o'er the meadows,
Taking with them the gloom of the year.

Behind them flow'rs soon will be springing,
On the air their odors will be flinging,
The perfume of gladness and cheer.

There seemed on the branch high above me,
A glimpse of the sky blue and clear,
And the songster gaily was saying,
That nought on this earth should be drear,
Close by him a robin came winging,
And soon on the swaying boughs swinging,
This glad happy bird began singing,
"Cheer up, cheer up, cheer."

On Viewing a Moulmein Sunset

Come into my soul, O Beauty

Shine in with thy gleams of gold.

Shine in with the warmth and gladness

Thy bright rays ever hold.

Come into my soul, O Beauty

And fill it with rosy cheer,

The light that makes me know truly

A loving God is near

Come into my soul, O Beauty

With thy wondrously blended hues.

Come in with the joy and contentment

Thy Maker's touch e'er renews.

Come into my soul, O Beauty

Steal in with thy tones of grey

Come in with all thy colours,

And in my heart hold sway.

Come into my soul, O Beauty

With thy gifts both of cloud and of sun,

And live in its deepest recesses

Till thy gladsome work is done.

Come into my soul, O Beauty

To cast thy peaceful spell

O'er all its fiercest struggles,

And tell it that all is well.

Come into my soul, O Beauty

I gladly surrender the key.

Come in and abide forever

And keep it aglow with thee.

Kazoo

Above the city's din
Far from its noise and care
Our college sits majestically
Upon its hills so fair.
So noble, true, and grand,
Long may she ever stand
Firm resting on foundations sure,
And guarded by God's care.

By The Side of the Road--Refugees

Yes, we lived by the side of the road

As the refugee stream passed by.

The rich now were poor

The strong now were weak

Sick, suffering, and readying to die.

And who can resist their quiet appeal

As they reached for a helping hand

A cup of water, a loaf of bread

For strength with which to stand.

We rejoiced that we lived by the side of the road

As these suffering ones went by.

Half naked, half starved, wholly weary and worn

And as human as you and I.

We were happy to help in their need and their grief

To give food and clothing and cheer

To help them trudge on, on the highway of life

With a courage that conquers fear.

Oh, let us all live by the side of some road

Where the sons of want go by

They are suffering from pain

They are suffering from sin

Let us help them, you and I.

For why should we sit in luxury's lap?

Indifferent when others plead

If love lives with us in our house by the road

We will share with those in need.

Can we see from our houses by the side of the road

The distant as well as the near

Are we visioning those facing forward with hope

And those who are burdened with fear?

How many there are on the highways of life

With longings as deep as our own

Oh, may we so live by our side of the road

None are left there to travel alone..

To The Eurodelphians

Oh, the Eurodelphians
You're a true and loyal band.
You're a credit to your college
You are always in demand
May your work be never failing
Ever faithful through and through
Then, hurrah, for dear old Euros
Here's a loyal song for you

Chorus: Oh, the Eurodelphians, Oh the

Eurodelphians true,
Hail, all hail for Eurodelphians
For the Euros tried and true,
Oh, the Eurodelphians,
All your efforts are worthwhile
Since you aim for fluent speaking
And a literary style.
You're a strong enduring cable
There is strength in every strand
Then, hurrah, for dear old Euros
Your the best on all the land.

Chorus.

Ode (owed) to our Alma Mater

Four years ago there came to thee, Kazoo
From near and far away
A youthful, happy band.
We knocked upon your door one day
To loftier heights we asked, the way,
And begged for aid and guidance from thy hand.

Thou didst receive us as we were, Kazoo

With all of youths defects

Oft loathe work,

And prone to shirk

What duty stern directs

Yet thou hast offered free to all, Kazoo

A treasure house of truth

Whoever will

Come take thy fill

And thus enrich thy youth.

"Whoever will may take," thus spoke

thy loving voice,

In urgent tones to each and all.

The proffered store was rich and full and free.

We might give hear and hear thy call

To gather knowledge from thy hall

Or disregard the gift from thee

Passing it by unneedingly

To us was left the choice.

But now the time to choose is o'er

That treasurehouse, abundant and so free

Has closed to us its door.

Whatever loss we feel, we blame not thee

Thou didst thy noble best

And left to us the rest

We could not ask for more.

Oh, Alma Mater, just a fair to all

Thou'st been and still will be

We leave thy hall

At duties call

With hearty thanks to thee.